

NOT REPRODUCED
ON PAGE 1-D

WASHINGTON TIMES
22 November 1985

Getting ready to face reality in Angola

CORD MEYER

Descending from the floodlit stage and glittering generalities of the Geneva summit, President Ronald Reagan is now faced in Washington with the harsh reality of tough choices that have to be made in deal-

ing with Angola's escalating civil war.

Even before the summit, at a National Security Council meeting on Nov. 12, the president and his senior advisers reached agreement that the United States could not passively stand aside if the increasing flow of

Soviet weaponry to the Marxist MPLA regime in Luanda and the further deployment of Cuban troops threatened a decisive defeat for Jonas Savimbi's UNITA guerrillas.

On his recent visit to Washington, Mr. Savimbi's foreign policy adviser, Jeremias Chitunda, advised both Reagan officials and congressional leaders that the Soviet-directed and Cuban-supported MPLA offensive this last September against UNITA's southern bases was only beaten back at the last moment at the cost of 1,200 UNITA dead and many more wounded.

Mr. Chitunda warned that the Soviet-directed MPLA strategy is now to keep the UNITA forces off balance during the rainy season and then to launch a second massive offensive next April with new supplies

of Russian tanks and artillery and Cuban-piloted bombers and helicopter gunships. In order to turn back this attack, Mr. Chitunda pleaded for timely American assistance, now that the Clark Amendment has been repealed, which previously had prevented for 10 years any American aid.

In weighing whether to risk overt or covert American involvement in Angola's complex internal strife, the Reagan administration has been consistently advised in the past by State Department experts to stay out while U.S. diplomats attempted to negotiate with all parties a voluntary and phased withdrawal of Cuban

troops from Angola and of South African forces from Namibia.

After five years of intermittent negotiations, the State Department African experts have to admit that there are now 35,000 Cuban troops in Angola, as compared to 20,000

previously. There is also a much larger Soviet advisory presence and a billion dollars in Russian arms delivered in the last year.

Based on this record, the State Department can ask for no more than one last shot at pulling off a negotiated settlement that leads to mutual withdrawal. If within a few weeks there is again no progress, the Reagan administration will seek congressional approval for some form of effective assistance for UNITA.

Armed with the real threat of imminent U.S. intervention, there is just a chance that State can make a last-minute breakthrough. MPLA President Eduardo Dos Santos has been urged by the black front-line states to avoid turning his country into a cockpit for superpower rivalry. The Cubans have become so unpopular that many MPLA black nationalists are ready to consider a deal with Mr. Savimbi to get the Cubans out. Whether such a State Department brokered solution is at all possible should be clear after the

Dec. 8 meeting of the MPLA party congress in Luanda.

In the absence of such a negotiated settlement, Reagan officials see no alternative to a policy of active support for Jonas Savimbi, because UNITA's defeat would have disastrous consequences for U.S. interests in the whole of southern Africa. The current presence of UNITA forces in the areas that border Zaire, Zambia, and Namibia creates a buffer zone that limits Communist guerrilla infiltration.

Secure control of all of Angola by Soviet- and Cuban-supported MPLA hard-liners would set the stage for larger attacks into Namibia. By posing a real Communist military threat, complete Marxist control of Angola would strengthen the hand of white racists inside South Africa and further reduce the chances for liberalizing reform.

Realization of the serious consequences of abandoning the brilliantly led and well-disciplined black guerrillas under Mr. Savimbi's

command has already led to a growing body of support in the U.S. Congress for both humanitarian and military aid to UNITA.

Opposition comes from those who fear that American help for UNITA would identify the United States as an ally of South Africa, on whose supply lines Mr. Savimbi is dependent by geographical necessity. The counterargument is that American aid would make UNITA less dependent on South Africa and would encourage aid from many other potential donors.

In the event that the Reagan administration finally comes to UNITA's assistance in the next few weeks, the hope will be that this intervention will not serve simply to prolong an escalating war. Rather it will be done to bring home to the moderates in the MPLA leadership that the time has come to accept Mr. Savimbi's offer of national reconciliation in a coalition government that can demand the departure of all foreign troops, Russian, Cuban, and South African.

Cord Meyer is a nationally syndicated columnist.